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Transcontinental Hard-Surface Highways

Extension of Remarks

of

Hon. William P. Holaday

of Illinois

in the

House of Representatives

May 28, 1928

Address of ARTHUR R. HALL before the
Sixteenth Annual Convention of the United States Good Roads
Association at Des Moines, Iowa
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"Without these hard roads Paris would have fallen. No one can realize what such a catastrophe would have meant to the world at large, let alone to France. Billions of dollars could not have replaced the beautiful works of art, the splendid buildings, and the accumulated treasures of the centuries.

"In our splendid isolation we have less to fear from possible war than crowded Europe. And yet, while we talk of outlawed war, if we are honest with ourselves, we recognize down deep in our inner consciousness that some day our own beautiful Capital or our own great cities may need defense. If that time should ever come, the great hard-surfaced highway system provided for in the Holaday bill would return in money value many, many times its cost. As a defense measure alone, then, the building of such a system of national roads would be fully justified.

"But we need not seek to justify the building of these roads on the grounds of national safety. From a commercial standpoint, from an economic standpoint, from a social standpoint, such a hard-road system would continue to return valuable and increasing dividends on the original investment.

"Let us see, then, what the Holaday bill really is. Speaking as I do for Congressman HOLADAY, my duty requires me to give a rather detailed explanation of his bill, now pending in Congress. I shall try to be as brief as the importance of this question will permit. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle to argue the benefits of good roads to this gathering.

"As I may have occasion to refer at times to the Federal highway act, I want to make it plain here and now that I am not opposed in the slightest degree to such Federal aid. I believe that the Federal aid already given to the improvement of our highways has been justified. I believe, too, that even though the Holaday bill provides for many great trunk-line highways, our Government will for years to come find ample opportunity and sufficient cause for continuing to aid the States in the improvement, within their own borders, of thousands of miles of the roads over which their rural mail carriers and local people must travel.

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"Good roads pay big dividends and are a real investment. The United States is amply able and can well afford to build, without any assistance from the States, the first-class nation-wide system of high-type hard-surfaced post roads provided for in this bill.

"WHAT IS THE HOLADAY BILL?

"The fundamental purpose of the Holaday bill, as indicated by its title, is to provide for the construction, maintenance, and regulation within and by the United States of America of a nation-wide system of durable hard-surfaced post roads and their appurtenances and the provision of means for the payment of the cost thereof. These paved highways are to be constructed by the United States alone without any direct help from the States.

"The fact that these highways can be built in this manner, right now while we live, appeals very strongly to most of us. We want to see results in our own lifetime. By authorizing an issue of its bonds the United States would be placed in position to contract for and construct these roads at once. In that way the people would get to use the roads while the bonds were being paid for.

"Illinois tried this road bond issue plan to the extent of $60,000,000. Did it work? Well, in six years the people of Illinois voted a hundred million dollars more to build additional roads.

"WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE PROVISIONS OF THE BILL?

"Under this bill all the work must be done subject to the approval of the President, but the immediate responsibility for maintaining the high character of the roads will rest upon four of his Cabinet members.

"As the Bureau of Public Roads and the interests of the farmer are placed in his department, the Secretary of Agriculture is given direct charge of the work.

"Since such a nation-wide system of hard-surfaced roads, if well built, would be of almost inestimable value in time of national peril, the Secretary of War is named as one of these four Cabinet members. It would be his duty to aid in determining the proper type and width and strength of a paved roadway

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that would be sufficient for all traffic requirements of war as well as of peace. In time of national danger these roads would be placed temporarily under his control.

"As a large volume of mail will be carried over these post roads, the Postmaster General is charged with part of the responsibility of constructing the high-type roads required.

"Because such a comprehensive hard-road system will have a marked influence on the commercial interests of all the States, the Secretary of Commerce is named as the fourth member of this very important advisory board.

"The Secretary of the Treasury, with the President's approval, must look after all financial questions.

"WHAT KIND OF ROADS MUST BE BUILT?

"The Holaday bill provides that the highways in this nation-wide system shall be improved by constructing thereon a durable, hard-surfaced pavement of the best type available. The roads shall be so built that they will remain in good condition, with low, reasonable maintenance cost during the life of the bonds and afterwards.

"A vital principle of this bill requires the highways to be constructed on the straightest lines practicable from an engineering standpoint. The roads shall furnish the most direct routes from one main objective to another. These main objectives are the National Capital, the State capitals, the principal cities, and the termini of routes.

"No route shall be deflected from a reasonably straight line in order to run through or near a city, even though the city be named on that route. If the construction of a route on such straight lines will carry the roadway at some distance from such a city or from one that should be given reasonable connections with the route, the Secretary of Agriculture shall build a spur or secondary road to make the connection. The Secretary shall not deflect a main route from its straight line or course, but he shall provide the safest and most direct and economical route, considering the interests of the country as a whole, rather than to run through or into any individual city or community.

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"For illustration: One route in this bill runs from Des Moines to Indianapolis. Danville, Ill., is named on this route, but if a direct course from Indianapolis to Des Moines would carry the route to one side of Danville, the Secretary must follow this direct course and then, if it should be deemed necessary, run a connecting spur to Danville.

"The bill further provides that these hard-surfaced highways shall be wide enough and strong enough to meet the requirements of the heaviest present general traffic and the reasonably anticipated future traffic thereon. Engineers who have had wide experience in such road building will aid the four Cabinet members in determining the proper type of roads.

"HOW WIDE WILL THESE ROADS BE?

"The paved roadways, except in rough, mountainous, or sparsely settled regions, shall not be less than 20 feet wide. They may be as much wider as the above-named four Cabinet members, with the President's approval, may prescribe.

"The bill also provides for superhighways near large cities. The paved roadways shall have not less than four 10-foot traffic lanes, or a width of at least 40 feet, for at least 25 miles out from the corporate limits of all cities of over 200,000 population. From the corporate limits of cities of over 800,000 the paved roadways shall have not less than six such traffic lanes, or a width of at least 60 feet, for a distance of at least 10 miles out from the city limits.

"These widths are fixed only as a minimum requirement. In many cases the four Cabinet members will undoubtedly deem it advisable to make the paved roadways wider or to extend the extra widths out for a longer distance from these cities. Near such a supercity as New York or Chicago the width of one of these great highways should, in many cases, be much wider than 60 feet and extend out at the increased width much farther than 10 miles.

"This bill also provides for the construction of belt-line paved highways around cities of over 200,000. Many times people traveling on a through route do not want to be delayed, perhaps for hours, by driving through a large city. By use of such a belt-line highway they could go from one route entering a city

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to any similar route entering it, without going down into the city's crowded, congested traffic.

"WHERE WILL THESE ROADS GO?

"The general plan of the Holaday bill calls for direct trunk-line hard-surfaced roads running from the National Capital to each State capital and from each State capital to every other State capital. There will also be many similar direct routes between the large cities.

"The bill also calls for great, unbroken, and direct transcontinental hard-surfaced highways. Similar direct hard-surfaced highways will lead from all the large inland cities to the great waterways.

"In general, the bill describes seven main east and west trunk-line highways. Five of these are real transcontinental highways. Two of the seven, however, run only from the Pacific Ocean to the Great Lakes.

"One route follows closely the Atlantic coast line from Eastport, Me., to the southern tip of Florida. Another route follows closely the Pacific coast line from the Canadian border to San Diego. Twelve other north and south lines run practically from our northern to our southern border.

"There are also two great diagonal routes, one running from Montana to the seaboard at Jacksonville, Fla., the other from El Paso, Tex., to Lake Ontario. Then there are more than 50 shorter but direct routes connecting the larger cities of the country.

"The bill numbers the different routes, but it expressly provides that they may be renumbered or be given appropriate names. I am not so sure but that when these great national highways shall have been paved the American people will prefer to know a route by some illustrious historic name rather than by an unromantic number.

"HOW WILL THE ROADS BE CARED FOR?

"This bill provides that the United States shall maintain these roads in first-class condition. The four Cabinet members will also have power to regulate the use of the roads. Uniform traffic rules or rules of the road shall be prescribed.

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"The bill also requires these Cabinet members to provide uniform markings along these routes. Traffic lanes shall be kept marked with proper guide lines. Wherever practicable inbound and outbound traffic lanes may be separated by parkway or other safe means, if such action is deemed advisable. If it becomes practicable to do so and it seems advisable, routes may be lighted up after dark.

"The bill also authorizes the separation of grades at route intersections. In many cases where one great route intersects another the duty to protect the safety of the traveling public will no doubt cause these Cabinet members to separate the grades by overpass or other means, so as to keep the traffic on one route away from that on the intersecting route.

"The bill seeks to safeguard the traveling public in every possible way. All railway grade crossings shall be eliminated, wherever practicable, by the construction of subways or viaducts. On a great national highway it would seem extremely unwise to send heavy traffic over railway tracks at grade.

"HOW WILL THE ROADS BE PAID FOR?

"The Holaday bill authorizes the borrowing of sufficient money on the credit of the United States, up to $5,000,000,000, to build all of these routes. But no more money shall be borrowed than is actually needed to meet the expenditures authorized by the bill. Bonds of the United States may be issued to secure the money so borrowed. In this way, the building of this nation-wide hard-road system would be completely financed. It would permit the Government to begin the immediate construction of the roads and to carry on the work continuously until all the roads were completed and opened for traffic.

"The bill authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury, with the President's approval, to levy and collect a small annual motor vehicle tax to aid in retiring the bonds. This annual tax is to be not less than $3 for each motor vehicle not used for hire and not less than $10 for each motor vehicle used for hire. The bill also authorizes the Secretary of the Treasury to impose and collect a tax of not less than one-half cent per gallon on motor-vehicle fuel to aid in retiring the bonds. All other Federal taxes on motor vehicles will be repealed.

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"With the increase in the number of motor cars, which is certain to follow the construction of such a comprehensive system of paved roads, the bonds used for their construction could be retired in this way without burdening anyone. The users of such high-type hard-surfaced roads will be glad to contribute toward their construction.

"It has been estimated that the saving in repairs, oil, gasoline, and depreciation by driving over a high-type paved road will mean at least 4 cents per mile of travel. If each car traveled, on an average, a thousand miles per year over these national roads it would mean on that basis a saving of $40 per car, or, counting the aggregate number of American cars, around $1,000,000,000 per year.

"Again engineers have estimated that the driving of a car over high-type paved roads instead of over roads of low-type will effect a saving of 1 cent per mile on tires alone. I am not vouching for these estimates on saving as that is out of my line, but if the figures of the engineers are even approximately correct, the tire saving alone by driving over the high-type paved roads provided for in the Holaday bill would each year be more than the proposed motor vehicle tax and gasoline tax combined.

"This saving on repairs and depreciation by the building of these superhighways will not work any hardship on the manufacturer or on the dealer in motor cars, because if people can drive cars economically, more cars will be bought. Again, the experience in Illinois has demonstrated that the building of a connected system of good hard-surfaced highways will cause the sale of cars to go up by leaps and bounds.

"WHEN WILL THE ROADS BE BUILT?

"The controlling idea in this bill is to provide funds, so that a connected and comprehensive system of durable hard-surfaced roads may be constructed at once. The bill provides that the roads shall be divided into convenient sections for construction purposes and that all reasonable efforts shall be made to complete the entire system within five years after the passage of the act.

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"The construction work shall, so far as practically possible, be commenced in the different States at approximately the same time and be carried on continuously until completed. In this way work would be going on at the same time in all the States and the roads could be completed within the five-year period named. The people in each State would get immediate benefits. And these benefits would be more direct and substantial than those arising from many great Government projects like the building of the Panama Canal.

"REFUNDS TO THE STATES

"Many States, either acting alone or with Federal aid, have already paved some of their main highways. Where that has been done, if these main highways have been built on the direct and straight lines required by the Holaday bill, and if they have been constructed of a proper type to meet its requirements, then such a State highway could, with the State's consent, be utilized as part of the national system. In that event, if the road has been built by the State alone or by one of its subdivisions, the actual value of that part of the paved road so utilized will be refunded to the State. If the road has been built by the State and the Government together, then the actual value of that part of the paved road paid for by the State and so utilized by the Government will be paid back to the State. The money so refunded to a State would then be used by the State either to retire its State road bonds or to construct new hard-surfaced post roads under the direction and to the satisfaction of the Secretary of Agriculture.

"AIRPLANE FIELDS

"This bill also authorizes the construction of airplane fields alongside these great highways. Such fields are already needed for the interchange of air mail and post-road mail. Such fields may also become of great value for military, commercial, or other national purposes. No one can prophesy with certainty what the future need may be.

"ADVANTAGES OF THE HOLADAY BILL OVER FEDERAL AID

"The Holaday bill is not intended to repeal the Federal highway act, but its main purpose is to build a national system

of connected hard-surfaced roads that can not be built immediately by means of limited Federal aid. Federal aid has not provided for the immediate construction of straight, unbroken trunk-line hard-surfaced roads of the highest type. Neither has Federal aid provided for the immediate construction of straight, transcontinental, hard-surfaced highways of the highest type.

"A map of the Federal-aid roads of the United States will show that many of these roads jog back and forth from town to town, following, perhaps, the winding trails of pioneer days.

"Then, too, a large percentage of Federal-aid projects has been of low type. Mr. Thomas H. MacDonald, Chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, in a hearing before the Committee on Roads in the last Congress, stated that 67½ per cent of all Federal-aid projects were of low type; that they were of graded and drained sand-clay or gravel construction.

"The Holaday bill has another advantage over the Federal highway act due to the fact that if the bill is passed the Government will have the means at its disposal to construct and complete, without any further action on the part of Congress, an entire system of superior paved roads that may be used any day in the year. Plans could be made at once and contracts let for the whole work. Federal aid, on the other hand, is not permanently financed to insure the completion of any particular system, but its continuance depends upon the uncertain action of each succeeding Congress.

"If the Government builds roads under the Holaday bill at its own expense, it can, as it should, make the roads straight and connected and permanent, so as to benefit all the people rather than the people of a single State.

"In the construction of roads near large cities Federal aid is limited to an amount wholly insufficient to meet the Government's fair share of the cost of roads that will be used by citizens from every State in the Union. The Holaday bill does not limit the cost but provides for roads that shall meet all traffic requirements.

"Another difficulty encountered in constructing high-type trunk-line hard-surfaced roads by means of Federal aid lies in the fact that some States may be either unwilling or unable financially

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to bear their share of the cost of the roads through their territory. Many Western States have large areas of untaxable lands which materially reduce their resources. This all means gaps in the roads.

"Those of us on this side of Pikes Peak do not want such gaps. Most of us hope some time to be able to drive out there often to view the great mountains, the canyons, the geysers, the giant trees, and the rare wonders of nature. If the building of the transcontinental paved highways provided for in this bill will create in the American people a desire to explore their own country, enough money will stay away from Europe each year to maintain these roads.

"HOW WILL THE HOLADAY BILL BENEFIT A CITY OR A STATE?

"Before I close I want to give just a few figures to indicate what the Holaday bill would mean to individual cities and States. The routes described in the bill aggregate approximately 57,000 miles of road which, at an estimated average cost of $50,000 per mile for a high-type paved roadway 20 feet wide, would cost $2,850,000,000. The above mileage is divided up among all the States.

"Out here in Iowa the mileage would be approximately 1,594 miles, which, at that estimated cost, would mean an outlay in this State of $79,700,000. This amount would be spent either in constructing new roads or, if the Government should take over some roads already paved by the State, in refunding the value of such roads to Iowa. Six great highways would lead out of this beautiful Capital City.

"The estimated expenditures in New York, Michigan, Illinois, California, Pennsylvania, and Texas would all go above the hundred million dollar mark. Texas, due to her great size, would have the largest amount.

"Around the large cities the value of the roads would be much greater. Take, for example, Birmingham, Ala., the permanent headquarters of this great good roads association. Six splendid highways would run out from Birmingham at a width of at least 40 feet for a distance of at least 25 miles. At an estimated cost of $80,000 per mile for a 40-foot road, this would

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call for an expenditure around that city of approximately $9,000,000.

"Twelve of these great highways would lead out from the city of Chicago at a width of at least 60 feet for at least 10 miles and at a width of at least 40 feet for at least 15 miles farther. At an estimated cost of $90,000 per mile for a 60-foot road the expenditure around Chicago would aggregate about $21,600,000.

"Eleven routes would run out of Indianapolis. These roads would be at least 40 feet wide for a distance of at least 25 miles beyond the city limits. The estimated expenditure around that city would reach $16,500,000.

"ARE THESE ROADS NEEDED?

"People who are well acquainted with conditions in the automobile world realize that the construction of new cars is far outstripping the construction of good hard-surfaced roads. It has been said that if all the motor cars in our country should decide to drive over its high-type paved highways at the same time, there would be a double line of cars with a spacing of less than 20 feet between cars.

"The construction of the primary roads provided for in the Holaday bill would inevitably lead to the construction of a large mileage of hard-surfaced, secondary roads to connect with the great trunk-line roads. Since Illinois voted $60,000,000 for the construction of a State bond road system, counties in the State have voted many millions of dollars in county bonds for the purpose of building good roads to reach the State system.

"At the time Illinois was making her campaign for good roads there were less than 400,000 automobiles in the State. During the campaign it was estimated that the saturation point would be 600,000 cars. But before this fine system of roads was entirely completed there were more than 1,400,000 cars.

"And now I just want to add that by bringing all the States into a closer and more intimate relationship socially, politically, and commercially by means of a splendid nation-wide system of permanent hard-surfaced highways, the Holaday bill will obey the Constitution, both in letter and spirit, and help—"

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to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

"The following resolution has been submitted to the resolutions committee, and I hope it will be adopted by this convention:

Resolution

Whereas the rapidly increasing number of motor-vehicle owners, with the correspondingly greater need and demand on all sides for good hard-surfaced roads, is far outstripping the construction of such roads; and

Whereas the Holaday bill, now pending in Congress, offers the traveling public substantial relief from this condition by providing for the construction, maintenance, and regulation within and by the United States of a nation-wide system of durable hard-surfaced roads and the provision of means for the payment of the cost thereof; and

Whereas a careful study of this bill shows that its early passage would secure to the American people, right now in this generation, certain vital and very needful traffic betterments and highway improvements, such as—

Straight and unbroken transcontinental hard-surfaced, super highways of the best type available;

Straight and connected interstate hard-surfaced highways of the best type available;

Maintenance of these highways in first-class condition;

Relief from traffic congestion around the larger cities:

1. By constructing straight, high-type pavements at least 40 feet wide for at least 25 miles out from cities of over 200,000;

2. By constructing straight, high-type pavements at least 60 feet wide for at least 10 miles out from cities of over 800,000;

3. By constructing belt-line, high-type pavements around cities of over 200,000;

Connecting with each other by direct trunk-line hard-surfaced highways the National Capital and all State capitals and all large cities;

Forming great martial highways in time of national peril;

Elimination of all railway grade crossings on the national highway system;

Separation of grades where practicable at route intersections:

Uniform traffic rules, regulations, and markings on this national highway system;

Refunding to States the value of any part of this national highway system built, at its own expense, by a State or by one of its subdivisions, so as to permit such a State to use its money again for the building of other hard roads or the retirement of its State road bonds;

Provision for financing the construction of this national highway system by the issuing of United States bonds to be retired in part by the users of the roads through the payment of small motor-vehicle licenses and a small tax on gasoline and motor fuel;

Provision for constructing airplane fields alongside these great highways for the interchange of airplane and post-road mail and for military, commercial, or other national purposes;

Promoting the general welfare of all the States: Therefore be it

Resolved, That the United States Good Roads Association, in annual convention assembled, does hereby give its hearty and unqualified approval to the principles of the Holaday bill, and it does hereby further agree to use its best efforts to secure the early passage by Congress of this bill (H. R. 6957).

Mr. HOLADAY. The Sixteenth Annual Convention of the United States Good Roads Association at Des Moines, Iowa, in session from May 28 to June 1, 1928, adopted the resolution set forth in the address by Mr. Hall.

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